

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members

One Body

Bible Study: Reflection on I Corinthians 12:12-27

Time Frame: Opening devotion for use with all groups meeting in the congregation.

Time Frame: Approximately 20-30 minutes.
May also be used with “One Body—Living Out of Joint” for an expanded session.

The theme and image of one body with many members – with each member essential for the wholeness of the body – is set forth in clarity in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. This image of the one body stands at the center of this study.

Read I Corinthians 12:12-13.

Reflect on these verses as a group.

- What is the meaning for you of being baptized into one body?
- What is your picture of the oneness of the body of Christ?

Consider these words of Paul to the church in Corinth within the context of their life together as a community of early Christians. If we read the 11 chapters that precede these verses, we find Paul openly addressing a church with divisions and controversies. He challenges his listeners to confront those divisions and deal with how they are to live with one another. He notes jealousy and quarreling among the people and the power that some have been asserting over others. In seeking their own advantage, they have been serving their own needs and keeping others out. Some have been setting rules for others to follow, arguing about the need to follow Jewish law in order to be a Christian.

It is a world not unlike ours, filled with division and separation – some asserting or being ascribed power over others; some having more resources and using them at the expense of others; some using the Word to keep others out.

Listen again to I Corinthians 12:12-13 within the context of today, and hear the word continuing in verses 14-27. How do you hear this reading within the reality of our world and the body of the church? Which members of the body are being disrespected or dishonored?

Re-read I Corinthians 12:12-13. Insert the separations of the body in today’s reality as you read verse 13 – “Jews or Greeks, slaves or free” . . . male or female, gay or straight, rich or poor, old or young, person of color or white, mentally/physically able or challenged – “and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Continue reading verses 14-27.

Reflect on the reading as a group.

- What are the challenges of these verses to who we are as the body of Christ in this place?
- Which members of the body are missing or are being disrespected or dishonored?
- What would it mean to fully live as the body of Christ in this place?

As we embark on this journey, we live with all the challenges and tensions of living as

(continued)

the body of Christ. Our jealousies and quarreling, our divisions and separations, our misuse of power – all these are not new in life together within the church. But it is clear in these verses that Christ calls us to live as new people – to live as one body, with many members; to live in unity within our diversity.

For Discussion go to Readiness for the Journey



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Need Help? Contact Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries | Phone: 800-638-3522 | email: ESMM@elca.org
Write: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

Part 1: One Body, Similar Members One Body/Dislocated and Out of Joint For Discussion: Readiness for the Journey

Setting:

Small group discussion with various groups within the congregation

Time Frame:

Approximately 1 hour

Introductory Reflection:

Several years ago I was cross-country skiing on a sunny winter day. The hillsides and trees were sparkling in the bright mix of sun and snow. The beauty of creation filled me with wonder as it enveloped me. The occasional laughter and talk of friends was a pleasure as we skied along. I was aware of the special rhythm of my body and soul, as my skiing felt almost effortless on the well-groomed trail. We rounded a curve, and I started down a hill that stood open in the sun.

With the warmth of the sun and the cold temperatures, the trail in that section had been moving through the cycle of melting and freezing and melting and freezing. As I started down the hill, my skis skidded out of control on the part of the trail that was now ice. I laid there for a few moments, and heard the laughter of my friends start to turn to concern as they called down to me, asking when I was going to get up. It was clear to me that I wasn't going to get up quickly. My right shoulder was dislocated and in great pain.

One of my friends was able to get a car nearby, and I eased myself carefully into it. Sitting there without moving, the pain was starting to subside. I thought, "If I move very, very carefully and we don't hit any bumps, this is OK." But at the doctor's office, I thought, "Now this is going to hurt." He moved my arm around and snapped my shoulder back into place. That hurt a lot! But then, with my arm immobilized in a sling, I could begin the long process of healing.

For me, my dislocated shoulder stands as a metaphor for the process of working with groups across race, culture and class. Grounded in the wonder and beauty of God's diverse creation, we live in a reality that binds us together as one. We confess this oneness in our creeds, and hear and see it portrayed in I Corinthians 12 as Paul creates for us the image of the body of Christ. Each part is important and necessary for the working together of all. In many ways we recognize our intricate connection in a global world and in our local congregations and communities. When all the parts work together, we can flow in effortless motion with each part adding its gifts.

The reality, however, is that we live in a world of brokenness and sin. We are part of systems that draw borders, establish states, and build fences to separate us from one another. We become caught up in patterns of fear, separation and domination. Our oneness as God's intended community becomes dislocated. We walk around one another, out of joint, moving gingerly and carefully. As a society, we think, "If we smile at one another and if we don't talk about race and just be nice, we can live like this and we'll be OK."

We know that it will require pain to talk openly and honestly about race, culture and class, to acknowledge the depth and pain of others as well as ourselves, and to confront the complexity of a history of oppression and systems of domination. But as with my dislocated shoulder, it is only through that process of pain that we can become whole and begin the long process of healing.

(continued)

Small Group Discussion:

If the group is larger than seven or eight persons, divide into smaller groups of three or four so everyone has an opportunity to share. Check with the small groups after 25 minutes to determine whether they need additional time. After small group sharing, re-gather as a large group for feedback and reflection as a whole group. Conclude the session with prayer.

In what ways do you see yourself living in a “dislocated” society?

How do you and people around you talk about issues of race, culture, and class? Are those issues part of regular conversation? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

Talk about your experiences and interactions with persons who are different from you by race, culture or class. How do you see those interactions in terms of dislocation, re-connection, and healing?

Describe the life and ministry of your congregation in terms of dislocation, re-connection and healing. Identify places of pain.

What issues and questions are being walked around or avoided in the congregation?

Discuss your readiness and how you see the willingness of the congregation to enter into the process of becoming connected with members of the body of Christ of race, culture or class different from you. What are the challenges you face.

Continue to History and Culture



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.